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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 001551

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SUBJECT: MA YING-JEOU WEAK, EVEN WHEN HE WINS

Classified By: Deputy Director David J. Keegan, Reason(s): 1.4 (B/D).

¶1. (C) Summary: KMT Legislator John Chiang withdrew last week from the KMT Taipei mayoral race after nudging from KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou. Ma wants the KMT to nominate a Taiwanese candidate and apparently favors former Taipei Deputy Mayor Yeh Chin-chuan. Chiang's departure, however, probably has more to do with the twenty-point gap separating him from the lead candidate, former Environmental Protection Minister Hau Long-bin. End Summary.

Ma Using Proxies To Campaign For Yeh

¶2. (C) KMT legislator John Chiang announced his withdrawal from the KMT Taipei mayoral primary on April 27, stating publicly that he did not wish to see the party further divided by bickering. Chiang told AIT that while he was careful not to criticize Chairman Ma or to accuse him of favoritism, Ma had improperly tried to sway the outcome of the primary toward former Taipei Deputy Mayor Yeh Chin-chuan. Chiang told AIT he confronted Ma shortly after Ma's mother and elder sister had appeared at a campaign event for Yeh, complaining that endorsements from Ma's family members were tantamount to an endorsement by Ma himself, violating Ma's promise to remain neutral during the primary. Ma responded to Chiang with the excuse that he "could not control" the actions of his mother and sister, and insisted he would honor his promise to remain impartial in the mayoral race.

¶3. (C) Chiang told AIT that before deciding to withdraw, he met with Honorary Chairman Lien Chan, LY President Wang Jin-pyng, and again with Chairman Ma. Lien, he said, "welcomed" his decision to quit, emphasizing that it would be better for Chiang to "keep his options open" than to be "tied up" by mayoral obligations. Wang, on the other hand, had from the outset urged Chiang not to participate in a primary which was, in Wang's words, "bound to be unfair." In their most recent conversation, Chiang noted, Wang stated he had "inside information" proving the primary was being manipulated by Ma. Chiang did not share this information with AIT, if he had it.

Ma Wants A Taiwanese Mayoral Candidate

¶4. (C) In his meeting with Ma one day before announcing his

withdrawal, Ma advised Chiang that his political future "would be better" if he quit the primary race. (Comment: Chiang implied that Ma may have been insinuating he might offer Chiang a position in his administration if Chiang were to withdraw now. End Comment.) Chiang believes Ma wanted him to quit because Ma is convinced the KMT should nominate a "Taiwanese" candidate for Taipei mayor. Chiang explained that since the KMT mayors in Taoyuan and Taichung are both Mainlanders, a "Taiwanese" KMT mayor in Taipei could help Ma attract more Taiwanese voters in 2008. Ma favors former Deputy Mayor Yeh Chin-chuan, the only Taiwanese candidate in the primary, said Chiang. He is using proxies like his mother and sister to promote Yeh, while discouraging Mainlanders like Chiang and former deputy mayor Ou Chin-der from running. Chiang said Ma controls the KMT's political machine, and despite appearances, it will be Ma who decides who the KMT nominee will be.

Smoke-Filled Room Better Than A Primary?

15. (C) After he dropped out of the primary, both Yeh and KMT Legislator and primary candidate Ting Shou-chung approached Chiang to ask for his support. Chiang declined to support either candidate, saying he would decide later. Chiang told AIT that a "worried" Yeh wanted the KMT to abandon the primary process entirely. According to Chiang, Yeh wants the Central Standing Committee to call Yeh, Ting, and current front-runner Hau Lung-bin to a special "consultation session," where the candidates can "negotiate" with party leaders who should become the KMT mayoral nominee. Chiang said this is how the KMT used to choose its candidates, and although it is less democratic than a primary, it does not generate the bad blood that a primary invariably does.

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Bad Numbers Pushed Chiang Out, Not Ma

16. (C) Chiang said that although his polling numbers had been improving over the past several weeks, he decided to withdraw because he knew it would be an "uphill battle" for a Mainlander like him to win the nomination, when Ma has made it known the KMT needs a Taiwanese mayoral candidate. An April 17 media public opinion poll showed Chiang in third place, 23 points behind Hau Long-bin's 34 percent popularity. Media opinion polls taken immediately after Chiang's withdrawal suggest his former backers split evenly among Mainlander candidates Hau Long-bin and Ting Shou-chung, who received five and six-point bumps, respectively. Support for Yeh Chin-chuan dipped by one point, to 19 percent.

Ma's Biggest Problem Isn't Soong...

17. (C) Chiang predicted that PFP Chairman James Soong will run for Taipei mayor, and although it will be a "big headache" for Ma, Soong will only siphon a few points away from the KMT candidate, not enough to throw the election to the DPP. Chiang also predicted former legislator Shen Fu-hsiung will be the only DPP candidate for Taipei mayor. Vice premier Tsai Ing-wen is popular and would make a strong candidate, but has never run for public office and has no desire to do so. Former Premier Frank Hsieh will not run, Chiang predicted, because he wants the freedom to run for president in 2008.

18. (C) Chiang told AIT that too many in the KMT take Ma's 2008 presidential victory for granted. Ma will need to unite the KMT to win the presidency, but so far he has been unable to bring Lien, Wang and PFP Chairman James Soong together under his leadership. Chiang said Lien and Wang are "watching Ma closely," hinting that both men would be willing to exploit Ma's mistakes for their own political advantage. Lien retains tight control over the KMT's cross-Strait

policy, and Ma "can only follow" Lien's lead. Meanwhile, Wang has considerable influence within the LY on both sides of the aisle, and still resents Ma's campaign tactics during the chairmanship race. The ideological split between KMT legislators from Taiwan's northern and southern counties is real, said Chiang, and Wang is the key to brokering solutions to those disagreements. If Wang doesn't cooperate with Ma's agenda, Chiang continued, it will make it very difficult for Ma to move forward on arms procurement or to deliver on other promises.

Comment: Poor Numbers, Not Ma, Forced Chiang Out

19. (C) Chiang's charge that Ma has interfered in the primary by allowing his mother and sister to endorse Yeh Chin-chuan is legitimate. But it is difficult to believe that Ma, who is known for his non-confrontational management style, would pressure Chiang to leave the race, if only for fear that Chiang would run to the press. The more likely scenario is that after weeks of polling a distant third, Chiang finally realized he had little chance of winning the primary, and quit. The rest is posturing for the public and AIT. Chiang is the son of Chiang Ching-kuo and grandson of Chiang Kai-shek. He has been involved in KMT politics for decades. He probably sees himself as the rightful heir to his forefathers' legacy, and Ma as an interloper, using the KMT to gain the presidency. Chiang did not conceal his disdain for Ma, and may be content to sit this one out, bide his time, and wait for the next opportunity to assume his rightful place in the party hierarchy.
YOUNG